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THE ELDER STATESMEN OF JAPAN: THE POWER BEHIND THE PORTSMOUTH TREATY.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS, AUTHOR OF "THE
MIKADO'S EMPIRE."

IN its moral significance, the treaty of Portsmouth is the high-water mark in the history of nations. It sets a lofty standard for twentieth-century civilization. It means the victory of right reason over passion, of science over emotion, of sober self-control over bluff and sham, the rout of militarism and the enthronement of true statesmanship as the rule of the commonwealth. Two of the youngest nations of the world, at the invitation and on the soil of the youngest of all, have settled their differences in a spirit of magnanimity, in deference to the dictates of humanity, and with a view to "the greatest good to the greatest number." Broadminded statecraft, obedient to the vision of the better Japan to come, rather than the anger of the misinformed multitude, or the pride of the exultant warrior, has ruled. Yet the victory of the wise in 1905 at the council-table, as fully as that of the valourous in the field, is but the repetition of the victory of Kioto in 1868, when a band of fifty-five young leaders turned their backs on feudalism and the sword to enter the brotherhood of humanity, vowing to win by brain, to uplift a nation, and to make trade honorable. They have steadily persevered in the determination to give Japan a régime of might based on right. Between the effusive self-styled "victor" and the real winner at Portsmouth, what contrast to the advantage of the latter! Japan has forever laid the spectre of the "Yellow Peril."

The best time for the making of a mutually beneficial treaty is just when armies are at their largest, and each has the expectation of overwhelming the other. A model treaty is that which breeds mutual self-criticism and discontent of a sort which, when

properly directed, becomes the motor of home reforms. Japan, as well as Russia, is far from "finished." Her greatest victory was over herself. She won by ruling her own spirit—a greater feat even than the taking of Port Arthur.

Americans, who are probably the most conceited people in the world, imagined that they secured the results at Portsmouth, and that they and their chief ruler deserve the crowning fame of the achievement. Possibly they do. One who reads only the newspapers may well rest in that calm delusion. So also can those who know Japan only in poster, but not those who see in perspective. With all honor to our American people, and President—too great to need an adjective—the real powers that, in the teeth of an opposing press at home, an over-conceited populace and un-sleeping hostile partisans, though refusing a meeting on European soil, responded instantly to President Roosevelt's call, framed the scheme of possibilities, decided the final issue, and accepted the responsibility, were Japan's rulers, the Emperor and his Elder Statesmen. A half-dozen Genro, or Senators in the Privy Council, best incarnate the nation. Their mind has been one with the Mikado's, ever since New Japan, on the 3rd of January, 1868, was born. Their prenatal political potency as well as public career has been one with his. One word of an "Elder" weighs a milliard of tons. Compared with his judgment, that of a young man, however able or brilliant, avails little or nothing. The characters formed in the sevenfold-heated furnace of the pre-Restoration decade, from 1858 to 1868, and beaten, like a Muramasa sword, to finest temper on the anvil of the events which preceded the constitutional year of 1889, count supremely with nation and chief ruler. The giving of a written constitution magnified the Genro, while it reduced other men to a common calibre. Tested amid storm and stress with their protégé and comrade, the young Emperor, whose boyhood's baptism was one of exile, fire, war, and struggle between contending forces of reaction and advance, the Elder Statesmen enjoy the absolute confidence, both of sovereign and people. They numbered in 1868, as our own First Continental Congress did in 1774, fifty-five, and they stood for nationality as against feudal division, for popular freedom as against despotism, for progress instead of reaction. They are now to be counted almost on the fingers of one hand.

Despite the folly of Tokio toughs,—wonderfully in their be-

havior like our own New York "Jay treaty" and "draft-riot" mobs—and the frantic raving of a press guided by young men who have never learned through centuries of training the right use of "liberty," the verdict of the Genro will yet be fully and gratefully accepted, and their names shine as stars, not only in Japan's "River of Heaven," but in the firmament of the world's history. Téi Koku Dai Nippon is a country ruled not by mobs, but by law. Article XIII of the Constitution says that "the Emperor declares war, makes peace and concludes treaties." The commentary of the chief and still most trusted statesman, who, in 1889, by the Mikado's order, drew up the text of Japan's fundamental law, says: "The Emperor shall dispose of all matters relating to foreign intercourse, with the advice of his Ministers, but allowing no interference by the Diet therein." Talk, in 1905, of "revolution against the Mikado" was gibberish.

How comes it to pass that, despite her modern Diet, or Houses of Parliament, her press, and all those outward phenomena of representative government, Japan is still practically ruled, as little Holland is, by a select (or Privy) Council of experienced statesmen, who can virtually annul the apparent will of the Chambers and "the people"—a phrase which in our sense in the Japan of fifty years ago was not only unknown, but absolutely incapable of being generally understood? Yet more, why does the whole Japanese nation usually trust these few men, as a little child trusts its father? Why is it that the Constitution gives to the Privy Council the whole question of treaty-making, thus virtually telling the Emperor what, if he is a true lover of his people, he must do. Why is it that, immediately after the Princes of the Imperial blood, in the order of precedence at Court, the power to approach the throne at any time is given to Marquis Ito, a man of gentle, but not of noble, blood? As President of the Privy Council, he could stand before all else, ministers, nobles, and gentry. One reason for this is grounded in the eternal truth that war is based on passion, and statesmanship is based on reason. Certain it is that

*"Beneath the rule of men entirely great,
The pen is mightier than the sword."*

The italics are ours.

Forty years ago, in Yedo, Ito, young and full of hot blood as he was, a Bushido swashbuckler, threw down the flaming torch

and bloody sword as weapons against the hated bureaucracy of the Shogunate. Then and there, he placed his faith for life in law, reform, and "brain victories" as the grander forces, even in war, and in peace, ever to be striven for as the noblest policy, and in making the merchant the social equal of the soldier. Unscathed by the ever-lurking assassin, he yet lives, the greatest all-round servant of nation and Emperor, and the one longest in service. Why, again, is it that Yamagata, Matsugata, Inouyé civilians, stand near the throne in equal honor with Oyama, even though he be the supreme commander of Japan's embattled hosts; while not far below, before generals and admirals, though holding no office and wishing none, and even in Government Opposition, Count Okuma, peaceful educator, economist and philanthropist, and Itagaki, the ceaseless agitator for the expansion of popular rights? Why, if not that Japan's real spirit, incarnated in Emperor and Genro, is for peaceful achievement as against martial glory, and for humanity in preference to acquisition through bloodshed? Can anything demonstrate more clearly Japan's real aim and love of peace?

Such matters deserve closest study if we wish to know the age-old tap-roots of Japan's government policy and her real, as opposed to her imagined, ambitions; or if we would appraise rightly the oft-predicted "menace" of Japanese to American success. The fears of European "Defenders of the Faith," or even of Yankee covetousness, are the last things to be taken counsel of, when seeking either facts or truth about "Orientals." The yellow dreams conjured up by the *delirium tremens* of sham "Christianity" ought not to disturb us. It is well to stand above the clouds of newspaper misinformation, and to take long views in the perspective of history, while for a forecast of the future nothing is better than a correct knowledge of the Japanese man. For, though mountains may melt, clothes, custom, and food change their fashion, and the once garden landscapes become factory-lands, that old conservative, the human heart, in Japan as elsewhere, remains the same. That which has been will be. Those who understand best the Japanese movement of the last half-century know that it was not one generated in the Occident, or by influences from the West, but that, however tremendous the reinforcement from without, it is true development of life from within.

I can remember Japan when there was not a telegraph, railway, rifled cannon, public hospital, Christian church, or newspaper; when Yedo bureaucracy, not so very different from that in St. Petersburg, was hardly more than destroyed; and when, poverty stricken, and often famine-cursed, a pitifully large number of her people, under the rule of the sword, supported one-tenth, the armed gentry and nobles, in non-tax-paying privilege, when millions in beggary or caste-slavery suffered unspeakable disease, or outside of humanity rotted on the roads, and when for all there was no more liberty of mind or conscience than in Russia. Thirty millions of human beings lived in compulsory frugality on a soil unable to furnish meat food, or even sufficient grain for its inhabitants. Pitiless economics allowed only the hopefully strong, but never a deformed, child to survive its birth. Japan had need of life and life more abundantly. The full programme of Mikadoism, which meant national unity, required that, first of all, the Yedo bureaucracy should be abolished and feudalism swept away. Only when these demolitions were accomplished could reconstruction begin. Four great clans led in the work. They faced colossal tasks not yet finished. "What are we to reform?" was once asked of Ito by a typical pro-Oriental. "Everything," was the answer. With Choshu's civil and Satsuma's war talents, Tosa's liberty-loving instincts, and Hizen's balance, the assemblage of abilities was superb.

The great embassy, which was to turn the face of the nation toward Christendom started round the world in 1872. Of the four envoys, Ito alone survives. With a septuagint of official men, bent on blending the East and the West, in a new translation, went five of Nippon's daughters. Sweet little maids they were, as I saw them in their flowery costumes. To-day one is the wife of Field-Marshal Oyama, and another of Admiral Uriu, while a third is the leading woman educator of Japan, who has sent scores of her sisters to American colleges. Those who know only the *geisha* and Nippon women of stage and fiction know not Japan. The Empire would never have arrived at its stadium of assured progress, without her noble women, true helpmeets, matching Nippon's manly strength with devotion and service manifold. In a thousand other ways, not willingly but resolutely, out of principle and conviction, defying Chinese, Buddhist, and traditional customs, these champions of Mikadoism, taking as their motto,

"Education the basis of all progress," consecrated themselves to the ideal, "No second place for Japan." Alas that our newspaper writers and tourist interviewers dub this, that or the other statesman, "the Bismarck of Japan," until Japan has in alien rhetoric a whole battalion of Bismarcks, but in seeming not one Gladstone, Lincoln or McKinley! Yet it may be that history will award to Japan's historic fifty-five a fame equal to that same number in our first Continental Congress. With clear consciences, with eyes ever towards Heaven's judgment on them, should they quail in duty as they saw it, they were ever under the hair-hung sword. Never a step forward taken without sacrifice! Continually environed by assassins and reactionaries, the reformers persevered. Every end of an era was in crimson. Against the lives of each of the ten Imperial ministers in his Majesty's cabinet, whom I knew in 1870, plots were woven. As for martyrs, what a bloody list, yet what a shining roll! Yokoi, Omura, Hirosawa, Okubo, Mori, and scores of men of lesser name, were slain by fanatics who imagined they were "executing Heaven's decree." According to the ferocious ethics of Bushido, each assassin masked murderous hate and damnable selfishness under patriotism's plea. No wonder that, when riding in the funeral train of some new victim, Marquis Ito smoked a cigarette. Etiquette aside, perhaps, he needed it to steady his nerves. The feudal *ronin* gave way to the modern *soshi*, and the killing of cabinet ministers became the fad of cranks.

But, and this is our point, what an education for the young Mikado in knowledge and choice of men! What answers did he give before the nation to the fanatics who travestied "Heaven" in their egotistic folly? Always one and the same—higher honors and more glorious reward to his statesmen-servants, Katsu, Iwakura, Okuma, Itagaki, who escaped the pistol, sword and bomb, gaining scars and losing limbs; while upon his dead servants he poured out with generous hand all imaginable honors, while ennobling their sons. One by one, that little band of fifty-five passed beyond the shadow, until the Emperor was left with only a handful of those most trusted sons of the gods. As we can easily understand, each survivor, because of the bereaved Emperor's increasing loneliness, became more dear to the Imperial mind and heart. As with the Cumean sibyl of old, the lessening volumes of life held the price of all. To-day, when all told, the survivors

exceed scarcely one hand's count, the reasons are manifest why these living oracles speak so authoritatively concerning the policy of a nation. To the Emperor, increase of knowledge has been increase of sorrow. Thus has he learned how to take the measure of a man.

Those who know the *Genesis*, in 1868, and succeeding books, of Japan's Pentateuch of progress, leading up to consummation in that *Deuteronomy*—which is not yet written—understand easily that while there are Liberals and Conservatives, Progressists, and Friends of the Constitution, so called, there have never been in constitutional Japan any real reactionaries. Even in the Tokio mob of 1905, there was nothing antiforeign, and no trace of anti-Americanism. With the new army, moved on the wings of steam and electricity, various insurrections, whether of farmers with banners of matting and spears of bamboo, or of knights of feudal spirit, under beetle-headed helmets and in laced armor of silk, bamboo and steel, were put down with ease. Then in 1877 came that mighty uprising under the ex-Field-Marshal of 1868, Saigo, the Satsuman, to crush which cost seven months of blood, 30,000 lives and \$60,000,000. This closed the era of reaction. Yet it so tested triumphantly the mettle of the peasant army that, after Saigo, Japanese laughed both at the idea of fearing either Chinese or Russians, or of ever becoming foreign-haters. To my mind, Japan accomplished nothing greater in 1905 than in 1877.

The Privy Council, consisting mostly of Elder Statesmen, was formed in 1886, and to them it was given to weave the text of the Constitution, sworn to in 1868 and proclaimed in 1889. In it, the whole question of treaties was foreseen, and the power to make and ratify settled—or, rather, reaffirmed. For, from “ages eternal,” that power had resided in the Emperor alone. It was the gathering wrath of centuries that in 1860 flamed out against Ii, the Yedo premier, for daring without the Mikado's consent to sign the American treaty negotiated by Townsend Harris. The spur of the Restoration of 1868 was the determination to reclothe the Emperor with powers which the Shogun had usurped. Hence, while that Constitution is what it is, all such absurdities as Tokio mobs or “interference of the Diet,” or semitreasonable newspapers, or the nonsense of “a revolution against the Mikado”—figment of ignorant foreigners—are beyond serious concern, while on the other hand, the liberties of the nation are sure.

While Article IX of the Constitution declares that "the Emperor issues, or causes to be issued, the Ordinances necessary for the carrying out of the laws, or for the maintenance of public peace and order, and for the promotion of the welfare of the subjects," it also adds: "But no Ordinance shall in any way alter any of the existing laws." Thus the Throne binds itself to maintain the liberties of the nation. Besides having supreme control of the Army and Navy, Article XIII, in grand simplicity, announces that "the Emperor declares war, makes peace and concludes treaties,"—for which no consent of the Diet is required, nor is any interference of the Diet allowed; while Article LVI makes it the duty of the Privy Council to "deliberate upon important matters of State (outside the scope of the powers of Diet, cabinet minister or envoys) when they have been consulted by the Emperor." Sublimely beautiful and rich in the heroism of prophecy, are the words of Ito's commentary of 1889: "It is not in an advisory body like the Privy Council that subjects should seek for fame and glory of the outside world."

The writer need not tell all he knows of the secrets of the old Dai-Jo Kan, or Supreme Council, table in the troublous early seventies, when, at times, because of fear of this or that clan, Satsuma or some other, or of reaction threatening colossal proportions, the Emperor was actually deserted at the council-table by his advisers. Under the written Constitution, Privy Counsellors can neither shirk their duty, whether easy or terrible, nor give the slightest publicity to their opinions without the Emperor's express permission. Nor have they ever quailed for a moment. Compared with the wind and wave of St. Petersburg, Tokio has been a rock. Certainly, on that Monday in August, 1905, when summoned by the Emperor to deliberate and advise, the Elders had an unpleasant duty to face. The newspaper-roused populace expected the humiliation of Russia, the cession of all Saghalin, and, most confidently of all, a swollen indemnity for a bigger navy, a larger army and, more particularly, for commercial expansion and financial speculation. These popular hopes were never, I think, for a moment shared by the veteran advisers of the Mikado.

Since everything has been done according to the Constitution, anything in the expression of opinions by Japanese concerning the provisions of the treaty, when exceeding respectful and loyal

utterance, is not only unconstitutional, but tends to anarchy. To dictate terms to the Emperor in matters of treaty stipulations is not only preposterous, but it is suicidal. If a Japanese subject does not like what the Treaty of Portsmouth covenants, he need not be fool, rebel, or traitor. Let him rather seek to reform the conditions which in 1889 made the Constitution the thing of limits, as well as of law, that it is; but which cannot, in either patriotism, law or decency be changed at once. Nor can any but desperate characters expect revolution in place of slow evolution. Do some Japanese even think that the Constitution ought to have been made like that of England, where the ministers are responsible, not to the Sovereign, but to Parliament; or that in its text it ought to have read like that of the United States—the servants of the nation being mediately responsible for the people? Very good; but this means in effect a disguised republic like England, or a real one like the United States. Is Japan ready for this? Hardly. Nations are *not* born in a day, nor constitutions “struck off,” nor does a true Parliament arise at the wave of a wand.

Every law-abiding Japanese still rejoices that the liberal provisions of the fundamental law, put into writing in 1889, are so full and explicit. All the world was amazed at the Emperor's enormous limitation of his Imperial prerogative. Though I speak with the furnace of Japanese party politics in near view, I can recall that when in Boston in 1889, with the faces of Japan's mighty dead, of the fifty-five of 1868, in memory, I first read this august text, every line of which seemed to me written in martyr blood, I wondered why meetings were not held in Faneuil Hall and the bells of the nation rung in sympathy with this Asian people. So wonderful an event, taking place in Asia and within a hundred years of the Philadelphia instrument, seemed a political miracle. One almost expected the Independence bell to heal its crack and ring out congratulations. To impugn or threaten that Constitution, or even to insult or lampoon the Elder Statesmen in the Privy Council, whose loyalty has been tried in fire, and whose patriotism grew in a field of swords, seems to me, an alien outsider, to be the height of folly,—the committing of national hara-kiri in the wrong age of the world. No sensible Japanese can go back of the text of the Constitution. Let him rather fight the conditions if he wants to, agitate for extension of the franchise, and strive for the political education,

in duties even more than rights, of the fifty million of his brethren. Make the Upper House of the Diet a true Senate with treaty-making power like that in Washington, and demand that the imperial ministers be responsible to the Diet and not to the Throne—but hardly yet. It is as certain as that the sun rose this morning that because of the victories in Manchuria, a great extension of political privileges in Japan is to be looked for. Nevertheless, the very experiences of the Japanese people since the late war began, show that they are not yet ready for universal suffrage. Better, a thousand times, Count Okuma's policy of steady agitation and solid education than a single hour of mob demonstration!

For, without denying the satisfactory side and some noble features, war is little more than incarnated lust. Its moral consequences reveal hell's crop, as of poisonous toadstools. Nothing is more ultimately disappointing than success in many battles. To this effect, Count Okuma had already sounded warning. The inevitable aftermath is social plague and moral pestilence. Twice has the Japanese populace been deluded by the deceitfulness of war. In 1894-5, to the Occident ignorant of the real organization of that amazing racial agglomeration called "China," there was a war between Japan and China, in which Japan won first glory, then humiliation, and again money indemnity,—with the certainty of having to spend it all quickly and of entailing an awful debt in fighting Russia. In reality, there never was any war between Japan and China, because there is no such thing in existence as a Chinese Empire in the sense that there is a German, British, or Russian Empire. What southern Chinaman cared for what went on in Chili, or Shing King? It was "only north man's pidgin." What did happen was a war between all Japan and Peking backed by but four or five out of the twenty-one Chinese provinces. And with what results to Japan? After the mobs and newspaper outbreaks against the Treaty of Shimonoseki, wild financial speculations led the nation into extravagance, neglect of real education, awful moral deterioration, and the necessity of wasteful military and naval expansion, with exhausting outlay in getting ready for the carefully prearranged war with Russia.

How has it been in 1905? Even more deceitful was this war with its victories. The nation girded for the fray in January and February, 1904. At once followed the postponement or paralysis of internal improvement, deterioration of education, and

self-denial of the poor almost to starvation. The land was drained of its youth, and the old men and women worked in the fields, widows and orphans uttered no cry. For a while, modesty, self-control, sacrifice, made the Japanese not only admirable, but models. But continued success made millions of them drunk in mind and imagination, while the statistics of loss were suppressed or manipulated with a secrecy that was horribly misleading. Forgetting that, with their leaders educated by British, German and American instructors, with modern machinery and forces borrowed from the most advanced nations, and near their base of supplies, they ought by all calculations to have won,—for their enemy, not only the most backward of Europe, and far behind in training, experience and science, fought at the fag end of his attenuated empire—the populace failed also to realize that, “compared with European and American development, Japan’s has been a mere bagatelle.” These quoted words are not the cold decision of an alien, they are those of the Elder Statesman, Count Okuma. Again, as the same level-headed wise man, who has all along given economical and moral warnings to his countrymen, made vivid in his article on “Militarism and the Rise and Fall of States,” he warned against bloodthirstiness, and scouted the old popular worship of *hara-kiri*, the sworded bully and the theatrical assassin. “Violence is the rule of *Bushido* (the Warrior’s code), and on violence it has been nurtured. It is out of touch with civilization.”

In 1905, especially after the Mukden victory, the moral tension of the nation was dangerously loosened. Rampant, degenerate, and over-fat with Russian blood, visions of the great mulct, so confidently expected, intoxicated the less wise among the Japanese. After Togo’s victory, they felt already the clinking of the Russian roubles in their hands. Again the atrocious proverb of the rebel reactionaries of 1877, who refused to lay aside the sword, pay taxes and work, came into vogue: “Though the eagle be starving, it will not eat grain.” After so interrupted a feast, during nineteen months, on (double-headed) eagle, Great-Bear pie and war jam, the peace milk of Portsmouth was loathsome to the new baby among the nations. Hear again the far-seeing Count Okuma, who was once made legless by the dynamiter’s bomb concealed in the umbrella of a champion of decadent *Bushido*, clad in European evening dress. On a like occasion with the

present, in the face of parochial patriotism and insular bigotry, he failed not in warning rebuke. In July, 1905, he wrote again:

"To-day Japan has entered the country of competitive nations. If she imagines that the sources of a nation's advancement do not lie in civilization, but are to be sought in the remnants of feudal ideas, and if she relies on armed victories, which encourage militarism and vitiate popular sentiment, she will be injuring her own progress and sowing the seeds of national decay."

In a word, the Elder Statesmen knew Japan's real conditions, soil, resources, and the problems awaiting solution. They had but slight expectations of indemnity or of anything save what Japan fought for and has won. As valuable as air-brakes on the train, or steel shoes on the tire, is this body of old heads, whose pure mind and aim would screen the evolution of the Japanese into modern men and keep their country in the path of sure progress and the permanent respect of the world. In 1787, old Franklin and well-balanced Washington were better, while Hamilton, Jefferson, Adams, and Clinton were good; so to-day we appraise the Genro of Japan. The treaty of Portsmouth crowns their work. How superb their record! Not alone with a Bismarck's energy of blood and iron, but with the patient, calm, exquisite balance, unremitting industry and gifts of patient adjustment, of a Washington, or a Lincoln, they swept away medieval feudalism, then made a new nation, and finally have won a place in the world's council of leading states.

Like Washington, having given free rein to the coursers of Empire, they stop the steeds firmly at the goal.

All the better off for not getting an indemnity, that would tempt the nation into extravagance, insolence and folly, Japan will now fall back on the ancient virtues of her sons and daughters, and within a decade reclaim her fallow land, suck abundance from the seas new and old, redeem Formosa, settle Yezo, exploit the metallic riches of southern Saghalin, set again in motion her paralyzed industries, open the mines of Korea, and make the peninsula a rice-field, and by trade in Manchuria and on the five continents win solid, permanent wealth in place of slippery war spoil. Every true friend must congratulate Japan that she got no indemnity from Russia. Apart from considerations of humanity, sound economics are the basis of history; and dependence on cardinal virtues the only safeguard of the future.

This is the end of an era. Japan's greatest and nobler problems are ahead. Let the people ponder this—her “progress so far a bagatelle.” Let her face the truth and not the flatterer. The time for Bushido is past. Tradition and mythology will not serve her. Let the Japanese drop the ridiculous fiction of “2500 years of history,” enforce a policy of truth in all things as the best weapon, accept the glorious fact of her youth and rawness, cease to suppress academic freedom, gradually relax that excess of secrecy which easily degenerates into deception and that has recoiled on both nation and government, and allow liberty to the individual and in the home—where it does not yet exist—educate her fifty millions, still mostly *heimin*, and make the merchant's career honorable. Asia's fertility is like eternity itself, its mineral treasures practically untouched, its ocean's wealth inexhaustible, and the possibilities of commerce undreamed of. The old ethnic hates are lessening, and the world is slowly but surely learning that, though religions are many, religion is one. Thus the seed-beds of war may one by one become the gardens of arbitration and reason. Japan has honored the sword and the fighter long enough. Let the peace-promoter have his turn. Predominant in Eastern Asia and in the Northern Pacific, her supreme opportunity has come to show herself what she professes to be—“second to none.” Let the spirit of the Emperor and the Elder Statesmen be followed, and she will surely actualize her dream.

WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS.